

**FOR PERSONAL PREPARATION**

**1. Incredible intrigue and family dysfunctionality mark these events in Jacob's life. Why God chose to bless sly and wily Jacob so abundantly is a real enigma!**

**2. In preparation for surveying these four chapters, scrutinize the "Group Bible Study Guide" for Nov. 23-29, for other background information (attached).**

**3. Possible outline:**

- Jacob fraudulently seizes his father's blessing. (27:1-40)
- Esau seeks to kill Jacob; Jacob escapes (27:41 - 28:9) <sup>1</sup>
- Jacob's vision of the ladder. (28:10-22)
- Jacob arrives in Paddan Aram. (29:1-14)
- Jacob's marriages. (29:15-30)
- *The War of the Babies.* (29:31 - 30:24)
- Jacob's Sharp Business Practices. (30:25-43)
- Jacob returns to the land of Canaan. (31:1--55)

**4. Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gen. 28:10-22)**

- ". . . Jacob's first direct encounter with God."<sup>2</sup>
- "God's covenant promise to Abraham and Isaac was offered to Jacob as well."<sup>3</sup>
- The ladder (or stairway) is reminiscent of Mesopotamian temple towers (ziggurats), ". . . atop which the deity was thought to appear to communicate with his worshippers."<sup>4</sup>
- "The counsels of heaven are executed on earth, and the affairs of this earth are all known in heaven. . . . angels are employed as ministering spirits to serve all the designs of Providence and the wisdom of God is . . . directing all . . . to His glory. The angels . . . ascend to give account of what they have done, and to receive orders; and descend to execute the orders. . . ."<sup>5</sup>
- "Whether Jacob was bargaining or pledging, God blessed him."<sup>6</sup>

**5. Jacob marries twice (?). (Gen. 29:1-30)**

- ". . . one of the very few explicit references to romantic love in the Torah."<sup>7</sup>
- "It was the custom of the day for a man to present a dowry, or substantial gift, to the family of his future wife. This was to compensate the family for the loss of the girl. Jacob . . . had none to offer. Instead, he agreed to work . . . for Laban."<sup>8</sup>

• "Jacob the trickster must drink a hefty dose of his own bitter medicine."<sup>9</sup>      ▶▶

▶▶ • Verse 25: "Jacob's accusation of deceit is richly ironic in light of his own deceit in passing himself off as his older brother."<sup>10</sup>

**6. Jacob's offspring.** See chapters 29 — 30; 12 sons, one daughter. Wives in **bold** face.

- Jacob and **Leah**: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issahar, Zebulun, *Dinah*
- Jacob and **Rachel**: Joseph, Benjamin
- Jacob and **Zilpah**, Leah's maid: Gad, Asher
- Jacob and **Bilhah**, Rachel's maid: Dan, Naphtali

**7. The War of the Babies.** (Gen. 29:31 - 30:24)

- ". . . God shows compassion to the unfavored mate, thus partly equalizing the disparity between her and her co-wife. Barrenness . . . serves in Rachel's case to place her in succession to Sarah and Rebecca."<sup>11</sup>
- In ". . . the Old Testament, parents often chose names that reflected the situation at the time of the birth. They sometimes hoped their children would fulfill the meaning of the names given them."<sup>12</sup>
- "The names Leah gives her first three sons communicate her deep distress at not being the preferred wife" (vs. 32-35).<sup>13</sup>
- Consider the meaning of the phrase (vs. 22), "God remembered Rachel."

**8. Jacob grows wealthy (Gen. 30:25-43).**

- "After strained negotiations about payment for Jacob's services, Laban agrees to his son-in-law's terms, but then tries to cheat him anyway. Jacob outsmarts Laban, cleverly arranging for the rapid proliferation of his own share of the flocks."<sup>14</sup>
- "The basis for Jacob's actions in vss. 37-42 is the folkloristic belief that what animals see while mating determines the appearance of their young."<sup>15</sup>
- "Although Laban treated Jacob unfairly, God still increased Jacob's prosperity."<sup>16</sup>

**9. Jacob breaks free of Laban.** (Gen. 31)

- Vs. 4, Jacob consults both wives, who remarkably end up agreeing with each other and his plan (vs. 16).
- Rachel joins the circle of deceit (vss. 33-35).
- "Most likely Rachel stole her father's idols because she was afraid Laban would consult them and learn

<sup>1</sup> Jacob's journey to Haran was over 400 miles!

<sup>2</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 58.

<sup>3</sup> *Life Application Study Bible*, page 54.

<sup>4</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 58.

<sup>5</sup> *On-line Bible*.

<sup>6</sup> *Life Application Study Bible*, page 54.

<sup>7</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 60.

<sup>8</sup> *Life Application Study Bible*, page 55.

<sup>9</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 59.

<sup>10</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 60.

<sup>11</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 61.

<sup>12</sup> *Life Application Study Bible*, page 56.

<sup>13</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 61.

<sup>14</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 62.

<sup>15</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 62.

<sup>16</sup> *Life Application Study Bible*, page 58.

where she and Jacob had gone, or perhaps she wanted to claim the family inheritance."<sup>17</sup>

## QUESTIONS TO USE IN GROUP<sup>18</sup> OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

### Passage: Genesis 27-31

#### LAUNCHING

##### For married folks

1. How did you meet? What were your initial impressions of your future mate?

##### For others

2. How important do you think "romantic notions" about others are in considering a serious relationship like marriage? How necessary is it for there to be "chemistry"?

##### For young adults

3. What differences have you noticed between boys and girls when it comes to "social relationships"?

4. "As a kid, did you ever run away from home? How far did you get? Next door? Grandmom's? the big city?"<sup>19</sup>

#### UNDERSTANDING Genesis 27-31

1. There's no way to read all these chapters aloud during group time! Either, (1) summarize the content yourself as leader, or (2) assign various persons **BEFOREHAND** to recount specific episodes, so the narrative is clear to all.

2. Get to know the main characters. See what consensus there might be about the personalities and character of:

- Laban
- Leah
- Rachel
- Zilpah
- Bilhah
- Jacob
- God.

3. What did Jacob learn by his dream/vision at Bethel? What does the text say (Gen. 28:16-22)? What else might he have been thinking or feeling at this time?

4. Supposing that Rachel was a co-conspirator with Laban's deceitfulness on Jacob's wedding night, what might have motivated her to go along with the scam? ▶▶

▶▶ 5. What was Jacob feeling when, on "the morning after," he realized he had been fooled in a similar way by which he had deceived his father?

6. How often did God intervene in Jacob's life—and why at those times?

7. What was God trying to teach Jacob when his wives were warring with each other, when his father-in-law was cheating him, when he had to escape from Haran under the cover of darkness?

#### MUSING<sup>20</sup> on Genesis 27-31

1. When in your misery has God showed you the kindness he showed Leah in her misery?

2. When have you felt like Rachel — unproductive, outnumbered, passed over, or "disgraced"?

3. Where in your own family can you empathize with Jacob's family: Too many "wives"? Too many kids? Too much competition? Too many conflicts?

4. Which of these family trials are of your own making? Where is God in all this?

5. In your own baby-making (if you are so blessed), to what do you attribute your success?

#### FURTHER MUSING (on your own)

**Ponder This:** In general, Jacob seemed a man of devotion and integrity, yet he had more trouble than any of the other patriarchs! Agree? Disagree?

Have feedback? Tell Dan at: [NananDrDan@aol.com](mailto:NananDrDan@aol.com)

<sup>17</sup>Life Application Study Bible, page 60.

<sup>18</sup>Leader should duplicate page 2 for easier application by group members; pass out pencils to those who need them.

<sup>19</sup>Serendipity Bible for Groups, page 78.

<sup>20</sup>All questions taken from Serendipity Bible for Groups, page 77.